

VZCZCXRO6135
PP RUEHIK
DE RUEHBS #1571/01 3271649
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 231649Z NOV 09
FM USEU BRUSSELS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY
INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 BRUSSELS 001571

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [KDEM](#) [EUN](#) [AF](#)
SUBJECT: AFGHANISTAN CONTINUES TO DOMINATE EU MINISTERIAL
AND WORKING LEVEL DISCUSSIONS

REF: BRUSSELS 1480

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¶1. (SBU) Summary: EU Foreign Ministers devoted considerable time and attention to Afghanistan at their monthly GAERC meeting November 16 and 17 (SEPTEL), with discussions on the issue at their informal meeting November 16 with EU Defense Ministers, their dinner November 16 with NATO Secretary General Fogh Rasmussen, and their meeting with Development Ministers November 17 at which UN Special Representative to Afghanistan Kai Eide spoke. The Afghanistan conversation dominated the opening dinner on November 16, forcing postponement of a planned discussion on the EU-Russia Summit to the next day. Kai Eide also delivered public remarks November 16 to the Development Committee of the European Parliament (EP), urging re-thinking of how European countries deliver development assistance. Reflecting this heightened attention, discussions among EU working-level contacts are focusing on improving the EU's civilian efforts in Afghanistan. On Pakistan, Council Secretariat and Commission contacts admit this remains an area where the European Union could do more. Despite the importance of these Brussels-focused EU-wide discussions, decisions about concrete increases in non-military and military assistance to Afghanistan will be made mainly in member state capitals. End Summary.

GAERC Discussions Focus on NATO-EU Cooperation and Development Assistance

¶2. (SBU) Afghanistan issues figured prominently in the November 16-17 "Jumbo GAERC," which brings EU Foreign Ministers together for meetings with their Defense and Development counterparts, and brought outside speakers to address both civilian and military concerns. NATO Secretary General Rasmussen spoke at the Ministers' November 16 dinner meeting. A member of the Swedish representation to NATO told USNATO that Rasmussen focused on four themes: the need to work on an ISAF-EUPOL arrangement (making pointed comments about the Greece/Turkey nexus in the follow-up press statement); the importance of, urging reference to rather than an "exit" used on increasing the EUPOL numbers, holding an extraordinary meeting of Interior Ministries in Brussels November 10 to encourage further participation in the mission. Reportedly, the EU now has approximately 310 trainers for the original mandate of 400. The Swedes again asked the gathered Foreign Ministers to increase their countries' contribution to EUPOL. With respect to the EU police mission in Afghanistan, FM Bildt told the press, "We have appealed to the member states to increase their contributions. We are making progress." Bildt said the situation in Afghanistan required "strategic patience."

¶4. (SBU) UN Special Representative to Afghanistan, Kai

Eide, spoke to the joint meeting of EU Foreign and Development ministers about civilian efforts at what has been described to us as a "very intense" November 17 meeting. Echoing his previous day's speech to the European Parliament, Eide emphasized the importance of reducing government corruption in Afghanistan. He argued the need for increasing the civilian role and improving civilian-military coordination. He spoke bluntly about the weakness of the United Nations in Kabul, and said there are essentially two options: further decrease the role of the UN or significantly increase it (his preferred option). Either way, he argued, there is a need for an internationally-recognized senior civilian representative who will be able to partner with General McChrystal. "NATO alone is not enough," he said, arguing there must be a strong civilian apparatus in order to mobilize the Muslim world and other international donors. Eide argued that PRTs are not the proper vehicle for aid. He called for coordination among donors and said international donors should change their

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focus and spend more money on activities that can generate revenue for the Afghans themselves, instead of infrastructure projects that he argued bring little economic activity. Eide encouraged the EU to consult with the Afghans about new aid projects, and reportedly said the U.S. did not talk to the Europeans, but also did not consult the Afghans about their priorities. Eide also announced that he was working on the civilian equivalent of the McChrystal strategy paper and would consult European countries and the EU about it.

15. (SBU) Eide's comments to the GAERC resonated with the ongoing discussions among EU senior and working level representatives in Brussels about increasing the civilian role in Afghanistan. According to Council Secretariat contacts, there is growing discussion about what is seen as NATO/ISAF mission creep into civilian fields, but also recognition that there currently is not a civilian voice strong enough to successfully lobby for the civilian role on the ground, given the UN's weak position. The EU Action plan announced at the October GAERC (REFTEL) was meant to be a first step in improving civilian coordination, but despite significant pressure from the EU foreign ministers to quickly implement the "dual-hatting" of the European Commission and Special Representative Office in Kabul, it has been difficult for the Council and Commission to draw up a workable plan for the new operations. As an European Commission contact noted, even if the missions were combined today, the same people would be working there in the short term and it would be August at the earliest before a new staff recruited to work under the combined mission could be in place. Many see this difficulty in coordinating even the European Union's own approach as increasing the importance of quickly finding a workable civilian representative.

Conference Must be Afghan-led

16. (SBU) Despite UK Prime Minister Brown's public offer to host an international conference on Afghanistan in London, many member states still prefer a Kabul-based conference to foster more Afghan buy-in to the process. If Kabul is ruled out for security reasons, Eide opined in his Brussels statements, the Afghan government needed first to set out its program to its own people. A later conference in Europe could set the stage for the next five years of cooperation, but it would be a mistake to do it too soon, without preparation. Specifically citing the March 2009 conference at The Hague, Eide noted that unprepared commitments usually went unimplemented. A Council Secretariat contact noted to us that no European countries were likely to challenge Brown over London for the location of the conference, but stated the European press has largely picked up Brown's comments that the conference would possibly discuss military withdrawal and thought this conference would be the wrong place for such a discussion.

Pakistan - Falling Off the Agenda?

¶7. (SBU) While discussions on Afghanistan have intensified in the EU, Pakistan rarely creeps into the conversation. A Council Secretariat staff member recently said Pakistan has fallen off the agenda since the AfPak Action Plan was announced. He opined that the Spanish push to announce a summit with Pakistan actually hurt engagement levels with Pakistan, and that Pakistan has not been keeping currently scheduled EU meetings (except for trade-related discussions).

Professional staff from the Commission and Council Secretariat say they do not think the Summit (likely to occur late in the Spanish Presidency, i.e., in late spring or early summer 2010) will have any concrete deliverables. Contacts say the United Kingdom is the only advocate for keeping Pakistan high on the agenda of EU discussions. Council Secretariat and Commission contacts separately voiced concern that the Friends of Democratic Pakistan process is stagnant, with regional actors and Pakistan absent from the scene. Additionally, they note the U.S. has taken a strong lead on the energy and electricity fields, leaving other countries unsure about where else to invest funding, with many still waiting for the Trust Fund.

Comment

¶8. (SBU) The European Union at a political level is clearly committed to a civilian solution in Afghanistan, but is having difficulty coordinating its own efforts, let alone a broader international civilian focus. Brussels would welcome a civilian plan that lays out a senior civilian representative with the proper international standing. The European Commission is currently preparing an implementation program for its Action Plan, which is due out by the December GAERC meeting. It will list the priority areas for EU

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assistance as defined in the Action Plan, including targeted amounts of funding. The member states will be asked to fill in their contributions. Despite the Commission plan, the bulk of funding and thus the success of the effort remains with member states, who individually must decide how much to increase both military and non-military contributions. While the Commission will be increasing its assistance for both Afghanistan and Pakistan, such increases are modest in comparison to the overall need. Rasmussen, Eide, and others in Brussels have clearly emphasized that in addition to soldiers, funding, civilians, and non-military assistance will all be needed in the coming months. The European Union has the ability to increase its support, but this must be encouraged in capitals if we are to see a true increased commitment.

MURRAY

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